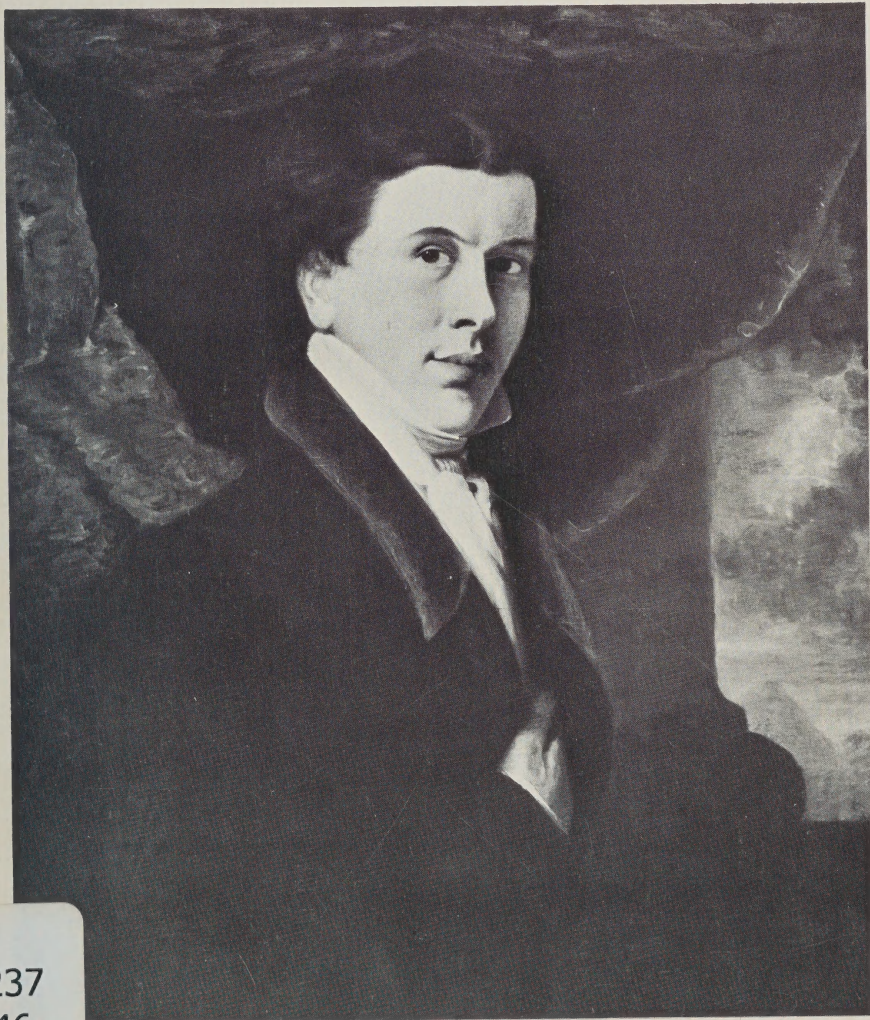


CHARLES OSGOOD

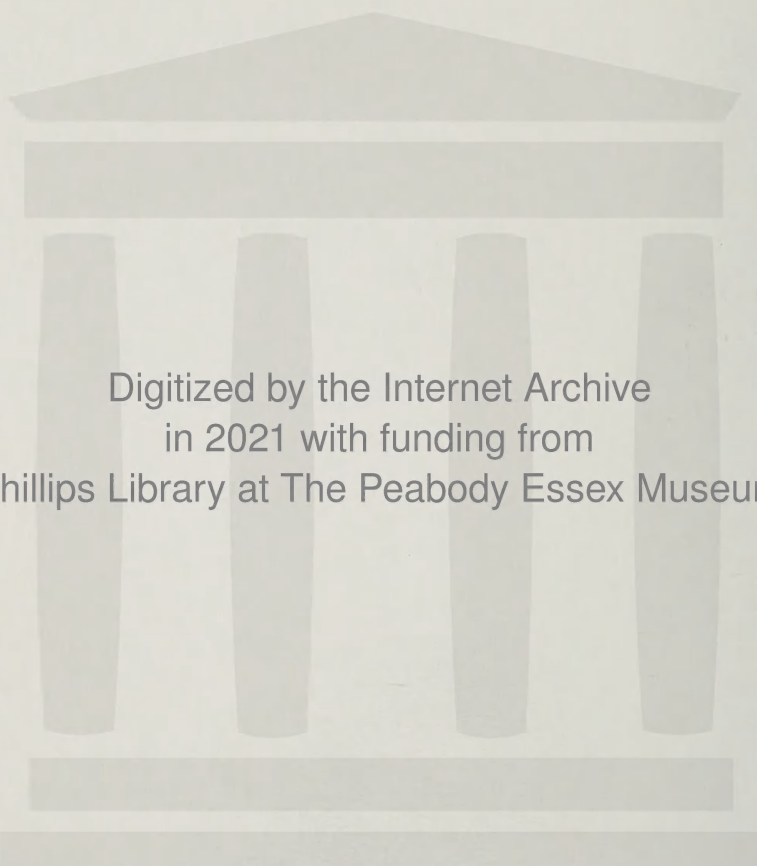
(1809-1890)

THE PROLIFIC PORTRAIT PAINTER OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS



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Salem, Massachusetts



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CHARLES OSGOOD
(1809-1890)
THE PROLIFIC PORTRAIT PAINTER
OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

A Special Loan Exhibition
November 9, 1978 - January 14, 1979

This catalogue includes a checklist of portraits in the exhibition prepared by John H. Wright and Frederic A. Sharf, and a reprint of an article about the artist by Frederic A. Sharf.

*Cover Illustration: Self-Portrait of
Charles Osgood, 1827
Private collection*

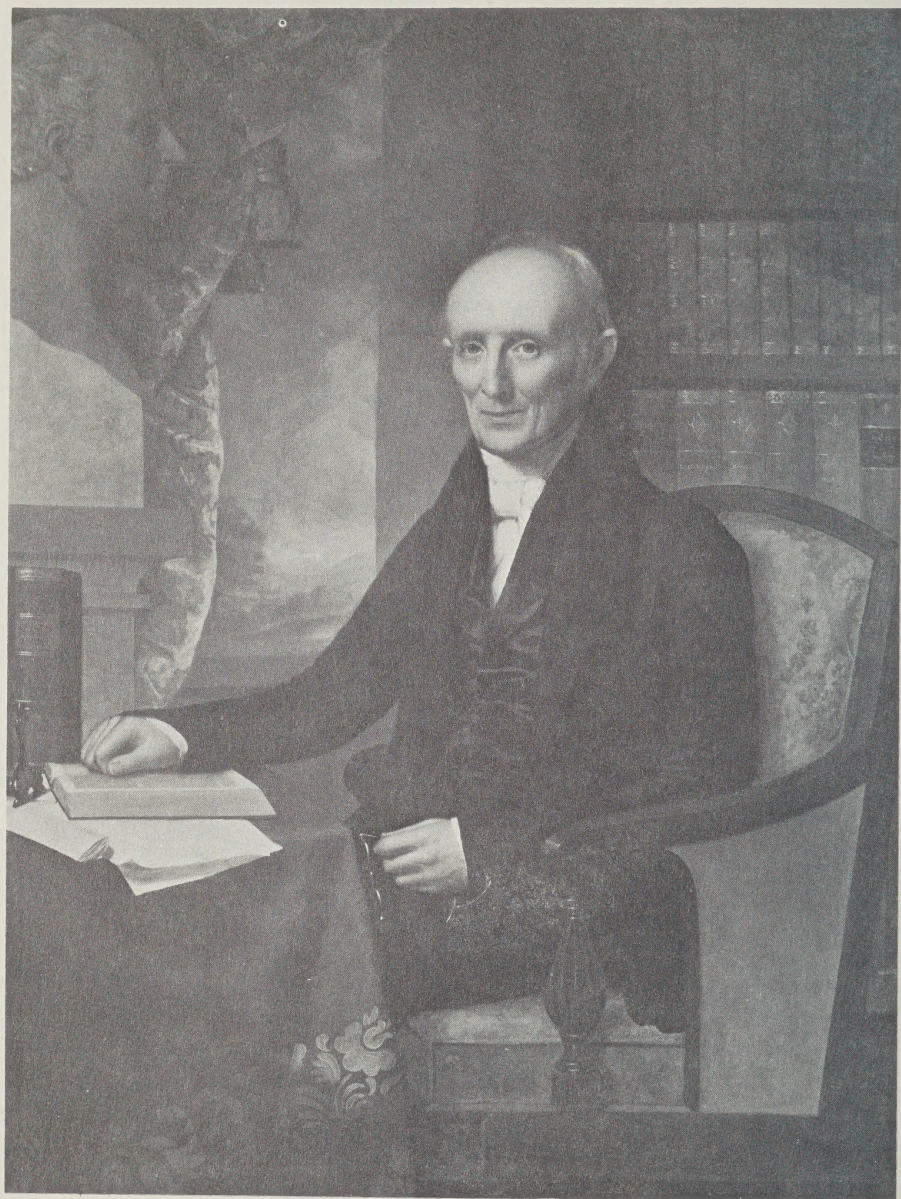


Fig. 1. NATHANIEL BOWDITCH (1773-1838), painted in 1835. 58 × 43½ inches. Peabody Museum of Salem.

CHECKLIST OF PORTRAITS IN THE EXHIBITION

by

John H. Wright and Frederic A. Sharf*

The Essex Institute has a complete list of all the paintings by Charles Osgood. All portraits listed in the following checklist are in the collection of the Institute unless otherwise noted. Measurements are to the nearest one-quarter inch; height precedes width.

The references to figure numbers after some of the titles refer to illustrations in the Sharf article which follows the checklist.

1. SELF-PORTRAIT (Illustrated on cover)
Signed and dated: Portrait of /C. Osgood./Painted by
himself./ At. 18/1827
Oil on canvas, 30 × 25 inches
Private collection
Charles Osgood's earliest known painting is this self-portrait done in Boston while he was studying under the nationally prominent artist, Chester Harding (1792-1866).
2. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, 1767-1848
1828. Oil on wood panel, 29 × 25 inches
Harding's portrait of the sixth president of the United States was the prototype for this copy by Osgood.
3. ESTHER POPE GRANT, 1790-1880
1828. Oil on canvas, 30 × 25 inches
The subject of this portrait was married in 1813 to Henry Grant, a Salem merchant.
4. JAMES D. GILLIS, 1798-1835
1828. Oil on canvas, 25½ × 21¾ inches
Peabody Museum of Salem
Captain Gillis was a navigator and shipmaster and had a fondness for architectural drawing. He became a member of the East India Marine Society in 1823 and died at sea near Batavia.
5. ELIZABETH COWAN OSGOOD, 1783-1872
1828. Oil on canvas, 26 × 22 inches
Private collection
One of the earliest portraits done by the artist was of his mother, Elizabeth Cowan Osgood. Of Scottish descent, she married Nathaniel Osgood of Salem on May 4, 1806.

* Mr. Wright is a graduate of Massachusetts College of Art and the Cooperstown Graduate Program in history museum training. He is assistant curator of the Essex Institute museum. Mr. Sharf received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Harvard University. He has written several articles for the *Essex Institute Historical Collections* and is a collector of nineteenth-century paintings by Boston-area artists.

6. EDWARD AUGUSTUS HOLYOKE, 1728-1829
1829. Oil on canvas, $25\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ inches
Dr. Holyoke was an eminent physician in Salem for eighty years. He was the first president of the Essex Historical Society, founded in 1821. This portrait, done in the year that Holyoke died at the age of 100, may have been painted posthumously.
7. ANDREW NICHOLS, 1785-1853
1830. Oil on canvas, 26×22 inches
Private collection
Dr. Nichols married Mary Holyoke Ward, Mrs. Charles Osgood's sister. The subject practiced medicine in South Danvers, and he was elected the first president of the Essex County Natural History Society in 1833. That society and the Essex Historical Society merged in 1848 to become the Essex Institute.
8. WILLIAM DRIVER, 1803-1886
1833. Oil on wood panel, 29×24 inches
Peabody Museum of Salem
Captain Driver of Salem is credited with giving the name "Old Glory" to the American flag around 1831. Upon retiring from a life on the sea, Driver moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where he was employed in the shoe business.
9. THE CHILDREN OF PICKERING DODGE, JR. (Fig. 3.)
1834. Oil on canvas, 29×36 inches
Three children of Pickering Dodge, Jr., and his wife, Anna Storer (Colman) Dodge, are shown with their favorite dog in a landscape setting. From left to right, they are: Ellen Barry, Edward Pickering, and Charles Henry.
10. JOSEPH E. (STEARNS) SPRAGUE, 1782-1852 (Fig. 4.)
1834. Oil on wood panel, 35×28 inches
Mr. Sprague took his grandfather's surname in 1800 by an act of the legislature. He was a member of the Essex bar and was involved in many civic duties on local and state levels. The subject is portrayed in his militia dress coat and is holding his sword.
11. NATHANIEL BOWDITCH, 1773-1838 (Fig. 1.)
1835. Oil on canvas, $58 \times 43\frac{1}{2}$ inches
Peabody Museum of Salem
Devoted to the study of navigation, Nathaniel Bowditch of Salem published the still-popular *New American Practical Navigator* in 1802. This very important portrait by Osgood depicts the elderly scholar and insurance actuary, possibly in his Boston library.
12. SUSANNA WARD OSGOOD, 1813-1844
c.1835. Oil on canvas, 27×22 inches
Private collection
Susanna Ward married Charles Osgood in Salem on June 19, 1838, and she died soon after the birth of their fourth child.
13. HARRIET MARTINEAU, 1802-1876 (Fig. 2.)
1836. Oil on canvas, 36×29 inches
Miss Martineau, who was born in England, was a social economist and author. Her portrait was painted while she was on a visit to the home of Stephen C. Phillips on Chestnut Street in Salem.



Fig. 3. ELLEN BARRY DODGE (1829-1854), EDWARD PICKERING DODGE (1831-1854), and CHARLES HENRY DODGE (1827-1846), painted in 1834. 29 x 36 inches. Essex Institute.

14. THOMAS NEEDHAM, 1779-1858
c. 1837. Oil on wood panel, $36\frac{3}{4} \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ inches
Like his father, Thomas Needham was a cabinetmaker and a keen businessman. He served as the first secretary of the Salem Charitable Mechanic Association, founded in 1817.
15. JOSEPH STORY, 1779-1845 (Fig. 5.)
1837. Oil on canvas, 30×25 inches
One of the most distinguished lawyers in Salem was Joseph Story. He was Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives before being appointed chief justice of the United States Supreme Court by President Jefferson.
16. WILLIAM SUTTON, 1800-1882
1838. Oil on canvas, $39\frac{1}{2} \times 31$ inches
Peabody Museum of Salem
General Sutton was a local bank director and had manufacturing and agricultural interests. He was also very active in military organizations and in Freemasonry.
17. NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, 1804-1864 (Fig. 6.)
1840. Oil on canvas, $29\frac{1}{2} \times 24\frac{1}{2}$ inches
This handsome portrait was painted by Osgood at the apex of his artistic career. Hawthorne, who was then thirty-six years old, was just achieving prominence as an author.
18. HENRY MASON BROOKS, 1822-1898
1841. Oil on canvas, 27×22 inches
Private collection
Depicted in his youth, Mr. Brooks later became a well-known Salem historian and numismatologist. He was a treasurer of Essex Institute and then became its secretary from 1888 until his death.
19. MRS. JOSEPH E. (REBECCA A. SHATTUCK) FISK,
1811-1884, AND DAUGHTER
1842. Oil on canvas, $35\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ inches
On permanent deposit at Essex Institute
The husband and father of the subjects was a Salem dentist whose office was on Washington Street during the mid-nineteenth century.
20. THOMAS TRASK, 1792-1863
1842. Oil on canvas, 36×28 inches
Peabody Museum of Salem
President Monroe appointed Trask consul in Surinam in 1819, and he retained that post until 1840. The following year Trask returned to Salem, where he served as a city councilman and alderman.
21. CHARLES STUART OSGOOD, 1839-1897
c. 1841. Oil on wood panel, $18\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{1}{2}$ inches
Private collection
The artist painted many similar bust-length portraits of children, but this one of his son is particularly charming. Charles Stuart Osgood later became a trustee of the Salem Athenaeum, corresponding secretary of the Salem Lyceum, and librarian of Essex Institute from 1888 until his death.

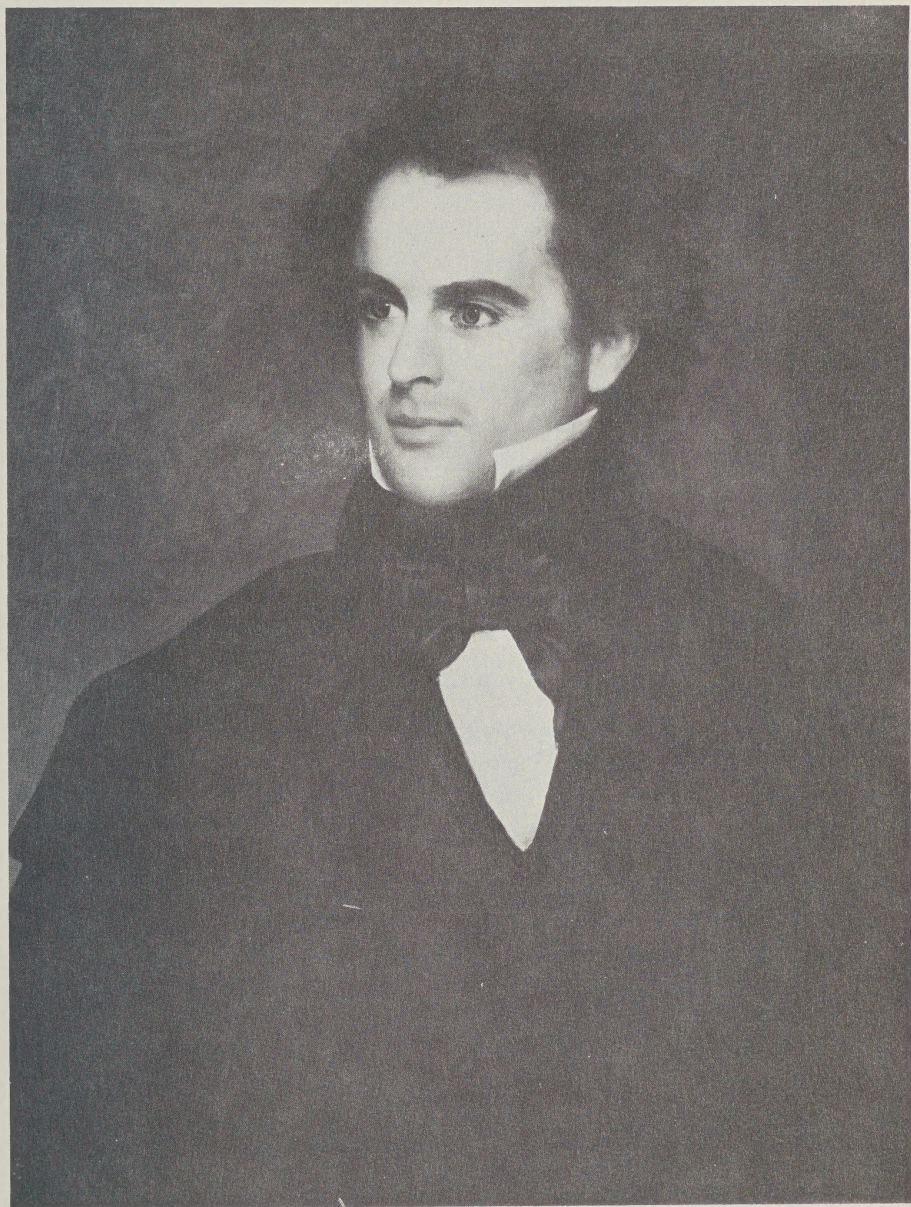


Fig. 6. NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (1804-1864), painted in 1840.
29½ × 24½ inches. Essex Institute.

22. SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1790-1876
1844. Oil on canvas, 30 × 25 inches
Dr. Johnson was the leading physician in Salem for forty years, and at the time of his death he was the senior member of the medical profession in Essex County.
23. JOHN BERTRAM, 1796-1882
1846. Oil on canvas, 30 × 25 inches
Private collection
Captain Bertram, like many other wealthy Salem merchants, began his career as a cabin boy. He became an influential citizen of his adopted town and a generous benefactor.
24. THOMAS COLE, 1779-1852 (Fig. 7.)
1852. Oil on canvas, 35½ × 29 inches
Although he was born in Boston, Cole lived in Salem from 1808 until his death. He was an active member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. This posthumous portrait was commissioned by the Essex County Natural History Society.
25. EZEKIEL HERSEY DERBY, 1772-1852
1852. Oil on canvas, 30 × 24 inches
Merchant Derby was the son of America's first millionaire, Elias Hasket Derby. It is likely that this portrait of the Salem agriculturalist was painted after his death.
26. KATHERINE EDITH PEIRCE, 1848-1891
1854. Oil on canvas, 30 × 24 inches
Miss Peirce was born in Shanghai, China, and died at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Her father, William Putnam Peirce of Salem, was a merchant in the Manila trade.
27. ELIZABETH COOK HUNT, 1809-1899
1855. Oil on canvas, 36 × 30 inches
The subject and her husband, Thomas Hunt of Salem, lived for several years on a houseboat in China. Mr. Hunt and a partner operated a successful ship's chandlery at Whampoa.
28. GEORGE REA CURWEN, 1823-1900
1859. Oil on canvas, 27 × 22 inches
Mr. Curwen was employed at the Registry of Deeds in Salem for more than forty years. Many priceless family-owned treasures were left to Essex Institute through his bequest.

CHARLES OSGOOD: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A SALEM PORTRAIT PAINTER

By FREDERIC ALAN SHARF*

CHARLES OSGOOD was born in Salem on February 25, 1809. His father was a shipmaster, and the boy grew up in the prosperous commercial atmosphere of a maritime town. Certainly, any conscious artistic life played a negligible role in such a community. Therefore, it is difficult to know why young Osgood chose to give up a career in banking to study portrait painting in Boston; but on September 13, 1827, Osgood commenced his artistic career as a student of Chester Harding.

This artist had returned triumphantly to Boston in 1826 after a three-year sojourn in England. Prior to this, Harding had worked in Boston long enough to absorb the style of Gilbert Stuart. When combined with his own eye for the ruggedly factual and polished in the sophisticated atmosphere of London, the result was a smooth and competent manner which quickly became the rage of Boston. Even the aged Stuart grudgingly conceded Harding's popularity, referring to it as the "Harding fever."

The erstwhile bookkeeper of the Asiatic Bank of Salem made speedy progress in his new career. By November 19, 1827, he was painting from life in Harding's studio; and within another month, he had opened a studio of his own at 6 State Street. For the next six months he kept hard at it, filling orders for such prominent patrons as Judge Story and the Winthrop family.

A long letter dated February 11, 1828 from H. Pickering of Salem to Osgood suggests some of the problems which confronted the young artist. Pickering warned him that he must not be elated by speedy success nor discouraged by occasional failure. The painter in this country, said Pickering, has a hard task, for "he wants *masters*, and he wants *examples*." The few painters

*Note on sources:

This article appeared in the July 1966 issue of the *Essex Institute Historical Collections*. It was prepared from typewritten notes in the possession of the artist's descendants. Mr. Sharf studied a large number of Osgood's portraits and searched through Salem newspapers from 1827 to 1860 to discover additional information about the artist.

capable of teaching do not want to do so, and the few paintings of sufficient quality to instruct are locked away from public view. Pickering advised Osgood to examine Stuart's portraits carefully, particularly "his handling the pencil, and attentively to consider his *colouring*, for in this he *excels*."

It is apparent that Osgood followed Pickering's advice and absorbed, as Harding had done before him, the Stuart manner. Stuart had made the life-size portrait bust his major artistic form. His style was painterly and spontaneous. He eliminated the highly linear quality of earlier American portraiture, as well as the strong dependence on clothing and accessories. This style pervaded nineteenth century American portraiture, and it was toward this style that Osgood gravitated, rejecting the more rugged realism of his only teacher, Chester Harding.

Osgood was never a pupil of Stuart, as some have said, for Stuart was in the last year of his life when Osgood arrived in Boston; and, even in his younger days, Stuart had never believed in having pupils. For a good many years, however, he had made himself available for consultation and, particularly in the case of James Frothingham, was occasionally helpful to younger artists. Thus, there is the possibility that Osgood may have taken one or more of his portraits to Stuart during the first half of 1828 for the old man's opinion. More probably, however, his knowledge of the Stuart manner resulted from a familiarity with the paintings of Frothingham, who had worked in Salem from 1820 to 1826, and from his studying of those Stuart portraits then in Boston.

In June of 1828, Osgood returned to Salem and opened his studio there. Business was brisk, his records listing thirty-five portraits completed before the year's end. Many of these were copies of original portraits by other artists. His portrait of Dr. William Bentley, a copy of an original by Frothingham, was commissioned by B. W. Crowninshield as a gift for the Essex Historical Society.¹ In this same period he reproduced Stuart's portrait of John Adams, Harding's portrait of John Quincy Adams, several copies of Morse's portrait of Dr. Worcester. Such commissions were often executed for professional societies and stemmed from

1. This portrait is in the Institute's Crowninshield-Bentley house and was illustrated in *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, XCVII (April 1961), Fig.2.

the patriotic desire of local citizens to possess likenesses of their prominent countrymen. This copying work was most helpful to Osgood, for the originals served as his teachers. They were the "examples" that Pickering had told him the American painter needed.

The three years from June of 1828 to July of 1831 comprise the artist's first Salem period. Aside from his work as a copyist, Osgood's original compositions at this time reveal, rather surprisingly, a dry and provincial style. His portrait of Edward Augustus Holyoke, done in 1828, is almost too literal and grim in its emphasis of the wrinkled face and the toothless mouth. His portrait of Esther Pope Grant, done in 1829, indicates how close Osgood was at this point to the tradition of the colonial limner. The flesh tones are pale, the drawing is flat, the costume is staged. The overemphasis of the wood and the upholstery of the chair, as well as the stiffness of the hand, all relate this portrait to the thousands of "primitives" which traveling limners were doing and would continue to do all over America until the daguerreotype and the photograph came into prominence.

It is important to realize how limited was the artistic life of Salem in 1830. The local bookshops sold engravings done in England: engravings of portraits by Lawrence, Copley, Trumbull and West; scenes by Hogarth, and a small number of romanticized landscapes. Also available at the bookshops were drawing books which aimed at promoting an interest in art and instructing the prospective painter in sketching from nature, and in the handling of perspective, light, and shade. Occasionally, large spectacular paintings were brought to town and exhibited for a twenty-five cent admission fee. An advertisement in the *Salem Register* for July of 1831 heralded the arrival of Veronese's "Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon." Such a painting, copied from the original in Europe, brought here by some enterprising promoter, served for the masses of nineteenth-century Americans as an equivalent to our motion pictures.

Against a background such as this, it is easy to understand why Charles Osgood left Salem in 1831 in search of a more sophisticated environment in New York City. He remained for only a year and a half, returning to Salem in December of 1832. Apparently

he failed to get a foothold in the highly competitive world of New York. However, the contact which this brief sojourn gave him with sophisticated art and artists was invaluable. It would be impossible to comprehend the sudden and dramatic development of a mature style in the mid-thirties without reckoning with the influence of his eighteen months in Manhattan.

Upon his return to Salem, he found that artistic life was stirring there. Chester Harding spent some time in 1833 painting portraits in the town, as well as giving lessons to Osgood's nephew, Abel Nichols. Nichols then became a pupil of his uncle before sailing for Charleston, South Carolina, in 1836, where he advertised himself as a pupil of "Mr. Harding and Mr. Osgood." Moreover, a Salem portraitist, Mannasseh Cutler Torrey, had returned in 1831 from studying with Henry Inman in New York, and, until his death six years later, Torrey painted portraits in a studio over the Union Marine Insurance office opposite Central Street.

Another Salem artist, James A. Cleveland, son of a local sea captain, painted portraits in town from 1835 to 1837, when he moved to Rochester, New York. In August, 1836, Cleveland offered to give courses in portrait painting and in drawing from nature, provided that twelve pupils would subscribe for twenty-six lessons extending over a three-month period at a total cost of \$4.00 per pupil. A year earlier, Miss Monds had advertised lessons in drawing and flower painting, chiefly for ladies, at a price of \$5.00 for twelve two-hour lessons. A miniature painter, Mrs. Livermore, was also active in Salem during 1836 and 1837. Her work was on exhibit at Ives and Jewett's bookstore and was well received.

Such was the competition Osgood faced. He quickly achieved an artistic style well beyond anything then known in Salem. Within two years, he had completed his major masterpiece, the large formal portrait of Nathaniel Bowditch. He did two versions of this subject, the first in 1834 for the Salem Marine Society, and the second in 1835 for the East India Marine Society. Both likenesses were based in part on a portrait head by Stuart, supplemented by a few sittings which Bowditch gave to Osgood.

The 1835 version, now in the Peabody Museum (Fig. 1), shows the author of the classic text on navigation seated on a red upholstered chair, his right arm resting on an open book on the

table before him. Above the table, on a pedestal, stands a bust of the Marquis de la Place, whose book Bowditch is translating. It seems certain that the composition of this painting derives from Samuel Morse's portrait of Lafayette, done in 1825-1826, which hung in New York City Hall, where Osgood must have seen it during his stay in that city. The use of the bust as a symbolic accessory, and the grand design of the composition is so unlike anything else in Osgood's work that it must reflect the influence of Morse's masterpiece.

The Bowditch portrait was done three years before the subject's death. Osgood did not minimize the drawn face of an aging man, but there is an alertness in the eyes and a softness in the expressive visage which give great warmth and humanity to the portrait. Osgood was overly attentive to the clutter of conventional accessories with which he filled the canvas—the bust, the books, the drapery, the bit of landscape. The tendency to rely heavily on a contrived formula from an earlier tradition is seen again in a different sort of picture, the Dodge Children (Fig. 3), done in 1834, where the contrived pose and the use of the flowers and the dog as sentimental accessories must derive from the late eighteenth-century English school as conveyed to Osgood through engravings. Both portraits are weak in color, and both have vague landscape backgrounds that are poorly done, indicating a lack of interest, as well as a lack of ability, in this phase of painting. Yet Osgood's great rapport with his sitter in the Bowditch portrait, and his great ability to group figures in an imposing way in the Dodge portrait make both of these works significant.

In another major work, the large portrait of Harriet Martineau painted in 1836 (Fig. 2), Osgood has eliminated such accessories as crowd the Bowditch portrait, and has emphasized the great bulk of the figure.² He painted her as a plain woman seated in a square-backed red chair and wearing a green dress with many folds and ruffles. While unable to convey the vivid personality which Miss Martineau surely must have had, the artist was able to make his sitter important by simplification and concentration. The green curtain background and stormy sky indicate a lingering compulsion on Osgood's part to include mannerisms of

2. In 1835, James Frothingham painted Miss Martineau in the same dress and in a similar composition. This portrait is now at the Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Mass.



Fig. 2. HARRIET MARTINEAU (1802-1876), painted in 1836. 36 × 29 inches. Essex Institute.

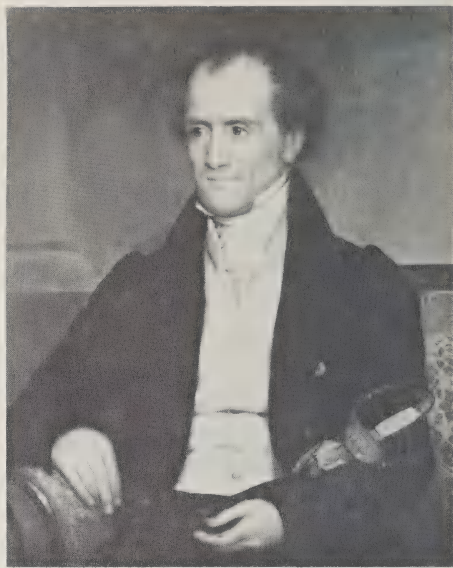


Fig. 4. JOSEPH E. (STEARNS) SPRAGUE (1782-1852), painted in 1834. 35 × 28 inches. Essex Institute.

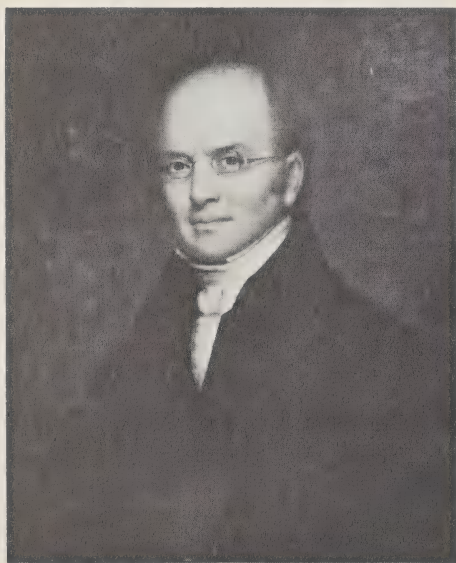


Fig. 5. JOSEPH STORY (1779-1845), painted in 1837. 30 × 25 inches. Essex Institute.

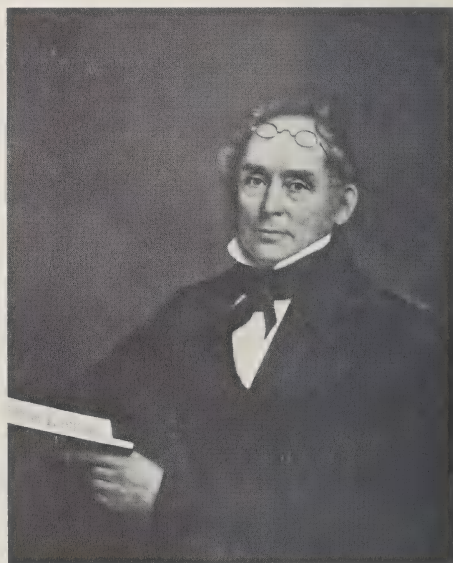


Fig. 7. THOMAS COLE (1779-1852), painted in 1852. 35½ × 29 inches. Essex Institute.

a style in which he was not at home. The lush greens of her dress mark an attempt to be a colorist, a phase of his career which he quickly abandoned. There is a flatness to the work which harks back to his earlier work, but which disappears completely within a year.

It is significant that contemporary accounts make no mention of either the Bowditch portrait or that of Miss Martineau. Miss Martineau had come to Salem at the request of Mayor Stephen C. Phillips, for whom Osgood painted the portrait, and she later wrote in glowing terms of the prosperous life enjoyed by Salem citizens. Salem newspapers in the summer of 1837 were full of excerpts from her book, *Society in America*, yet no mention was made of Osgood's portrait. He does not seem to have made his presence in town an important fact, as his contemporary Fitz Hugh Lane succeeded in doing in Gloucester. Lane's work is frequently commented on in Gloucester newspapers, whereas, in Salem newspapers from 1827 to 1860, I found not one mention of Charles Osgood.

Osgood was most successful in his portrayal of less important sitters. His portrait of Joseph Sprague, done about 1834, shows a dashing figure seated on an Empire couch; his waistcoat is blue, his vest yellow (Fig. 4). There is a simple, clean-cut outline to the body and a neat treatment of clothes and accessories. A tendency toward greater simplicity of design characterizes many other portraits of Osgood's second Salem period. The Salem coachmaker, Nathaniel Frothingham, was portrayed in 1836 as if he were a banker. A massive triangular form fills the canvas; the background of a red curtain gives the sitter an air of elegance, while a handsome shirt and a ruddy complexion combine to suggest both opulence and a teeming vitality. A year later Osgood painted the handsome portrait of Joseph Story for the Essex Historical Society (Fig. 5). Story is seen full face to the viewer against a glowing red background, and our attention is at once arrested by the twinkling eyes and the expressive mouth. Such portraits typify Osgood's mature style and his highest artistic expression. There is a litheness in the bodies of the sitters, a confident look upon their faces, and a glow to their complexions. The compositions are tightly and impressively structured within a pyramidal design, and the coloring is rich, but not obtrusive.

During these years the prices which his work commanded rose modestly. In 1828, he had received \$25.00 for his portrait of Judge Joseph Gilbert Waters, plus \$8.25 for the frame. By 1840 a portrait brought \$40.00, plus \$10.00 for its frame. It is obvious that Osgood could never have risen to riches at such rates. We perceive that Osgood, like most of his contemporaries, supervised the framing of the pictures he painted. At that time the frame was given an excessive importance and there was a wide preference for ornate and heavy gold leafed ones. These often overpowered the spectator and tended to deëmphasize the picture, and to focus attention upon picture and frame together as a decorative unit.

In spite of the success which Osgood achieved in Salem during the 1830s, he had not lost his desire to try to establish himself in a larger metropolitan area. During the thirties, he had maintained a tentative contact with Boston, exhibiting at the Athenaeum in 1835, 1836, and 1837. But it was New York which continued to fascinate Osgood, and late in 1839 he left Salem for another try at the New York art world. This time he was well armed with letters of introduction from Salem and Boston merchants to their New York counterparts. By the spring of 1840, however, Osgood had made no better progress than he had eight years earlier; his Boston friend Robert C. Winthrop sent money to keep him going. But it was of no use, and Osgood returned to Salem in the summer of 1840.

Osgood's return was scarcely noticed amidst the enthusiastic public attention being given to Abel Nichols' large, but mediocre, portrait of Whig presidential candidate William Henry Harrison, which was on exhibit at Mechanics Hall and elsewhere in Salem during the early autumn of 1840. Nichols had journeyed to Cincinnati to paint the portrait for the Danvers Whig Association. While there, he completed portraits of other Cincinnati notables, for which he received great praise in the press of that city, as well as frequent publicity in the *Salem Gazette*. Meanwhile, Osgood's truly superb portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne went unnoticed (Fig. 6). This portrait has a dash and a verve, a twinkle to the eyes, a romance to the flying hair, a boldness to the figure—qualities which are completely lacking in Nichols' plodding portrait of Harrison.

The Hawthorne portrait represented the culmination of Osgood's mature style. Within a year after its completion, something happened to his art. His creative instincts faded away, as did a certain quality of artistic excitement which permeated his best pictures of the thirties. After 1840, his work drifted with the tide of public taste, becoming either dry and dull on the one hand, or overly sentimental and sweet on the other. These qualities reflected in art the hard-headed materialism which marked American commercial life, as well as the warmed over European romanticism imported to counteract the grim competitiveness of American life.

Charles Osgood's work in the forties and fifties typifies this new influence. His large portrait of Thomas Cole was commissioned by the Essex County Natural History Society, of which Cole was a vice-president (Fig. 7). Cole looks out from a dull background in what was probably a typical pose, with his glasses lifted on his forehead, a book before him. Nothing could be more factual, and at the same time less interesting or less charming.

In another mood, Osgood turned to portraits of women and children. These fairly drip with Victorian sweetness. His portrait of Eliza Ann Hoffman, done in 1845, is posed in the new manner, with the head tilted. A vestige of charm still lingers in the "scoop neck" and the blue dress with red sash. Three years later, in his portraits of John and Georgianna Felt, the insipidity, dryness, and lifelessness that had befallen his art drowned out even the charm that is inherent in childhood.

In addition to the production of such pictures, Osgood was still active as a copyist, reproducing his own work as well as that of other artists. He even sank to painting portraits of recently deceased persons from plaster casts of their faces taken before burial. Writing in September of 1847, Mr. M. A. Stickney actually boasted of Osgood's proficiency in doing such a portrait of Stickney's recently deceased wife. That Osgood should have been forced to stoop to such chores in order to make a living is indicative of the status of the artist in American society. Osgood was regarded primarily as an artisan, who could adequately perform a manual task. His artistic ability was unimportant even to those who patronized him, and the community at large seems to have benefited very little from his presence.

It is certainly more than coincidental that the year 1840 marked both the beginning of Osgood's artistic decline, and the arrival in Salem of the first successful daguerreotypist. In April, 1840, a Mr. Gouraud came to town, both to lecture on the new technique and to demonstrate it by taking portraits and scenic views. Within a year there were several permanent daguerreotype studios firmly established in Salem.

This new influence was not so much an immediate competitor of the portrait painter, for it appealed to a mass market, as it was a portent of things to come. Now the work of the artist had to measure up against a new standard. What appealed to Americans in the daguerreotype was that it reproduced them exactly as they were, and it did so speedily and inexpensively. Osgood's portrait of Captain Thomas Hunt, done in 1855, seems to compete with the new process. The big China trader is shown in three-quarters length; the paint is dry, its tonality dull. The picture aims at a photographic matter-of-factness which defies analysis, and its only advantage over a daguerreotype is in its terrific size.

While I do not feel that the daguerreotype was solely responsible for the demise of portraiture, there is no denying its enormous and regrettable influence on American taste. Portrait painting in this country had from the beginning been rooted in realism; Copley and Stuart had added a dimension of imagination and style to this tradition, elevating American portraiture to an art. Osgood and others had carried on this tradition, maintaining it as a true art form. But the spread of ugliness and bad taste over American aesthetics, aided by such vestiges of the new machine age as the daguerreotype, swamped men like Osgood, who more properly belonged to the previous generation. By the 1840s, he had outlived the type of America which was congenial to his own taste, and in conforming to the new America he cast aside the artistic tradition which had nurtured his talents.

Osgood remained active as a portrait painter until 1863, when his last known portrait was completed. He then turned his attention to the painting of landscapes until his death on December 26, 1890, in Salem. It is interesting to note that he never included figures in any of these landscapes, and he did not achieve any great warmth of color in these paintings.

However, Charles Osgood had been able to transform his own early limner style into a style of great sophistication. Combining an eye for realism with a flare for grace, Osgood carefully developed his talents by hard work. While never a consistently inspired artist, he was at his best more than a mere craftsman. In his golden years, between 1835 and 1840, his portraits reflect an ability, an honesty, and a sincerity which assure them a deserving place in our artistic heritage.



Charles Osgood lived in the three-story wooden dwelling at 13-15 (formerly 11) Central Street from about 1837 until 1850. He maintained a painting studio from 1828 until 1867, next door in the brick building which is now the Salem Fraternity. This photograph was taken c. 1860.
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